

R E F L E X I O N S *K*

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I N C R E D U L I T Y

With regard to

R E L I G I O N

J. R. J. Foster

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following treatise was left imperfect by the author, a late eminent lawyer; who was no less conspicuous for his zeal in the cause of Religion, than for his sincere love of justice, and an invariable attachment to the laws of his country, in the several high stations he filled with applause. That it is unfinished, was occasioned by his death, an event universally lamented: that it is now published, is owing to some of his friends; who are willing to believe, that even a fragment by so masterly a hand may not be an unacceptable present to the publick.

REFLEXIONS

O N

IN CREDULITY.

IT is rash to affirm, that the universe, or even the solar system, was made principally for the sake of the earth, or of man; because, for ought we know, there may be many more, and more considerable uses for it. It is at the same time not certain, at least to me it does not appear to be so, that there was any other use for creating these immense heavenly bodies, but to regulate the motion of the earth; to produce the other effects which some of them evidently have, and all of them in a greater or smaller proportion may have on the earth; and to raise in man that idea of the magnificence, power, and skill of the Creator, which the contemplation of the immensity, motion, order, beauty, and utility of these bodies must produce.

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IT is because we know not whether those bodies are inhabited, that we cannot pronounce, that the utility they bring us, is or is not the only end of creating them. If they are inhabited, the inhabitants must be of a texture very different from those of the earth. But we cannot deem it impossible, that beings may have been made, fit to reside, to act, and to think, in the very centre, as well as on the surface of the sun.

BUT, without determining that question, which the scantiness of our lights will not permit us to decide; it is obvious, that, besides the physical influence which these bodies may have on the earth, and on us, it must have been one, and that no inconsiderable end of the making them, to help man to such an idea as has been mentioned of the Creator.

IT is rash to say, that any one part of the furniture of this earth is useless; that there is not some utility in the various soils and metals; or that the different plants, insects, reptiles, fish, fowls, quadrupeds, are not necessary

cessary for certain purposes, though we have not yet discovered them. Who will deny usefulness to poisonous plants; or dare affirm that moths, rats, toads, vipers, and other vermin, have not been intended for proper and fit uses? It is bold to assert, that the least animalcule discovered by the microscope, has not its proper use in nature.

IT seems unreasonable to say, that God framed all the ornament of this earth, to satisfy himself that he could do it; since he perfectly knew, that he could do every thing that does not involve contradiction.

BUT, as the whole frame of this earth, so far as we know it, and every plant and living creature that are supported by it, are, to man, strict and very obvious demonstrations of the power and wisdom of the Creator; as the œconomy and disposition of the whole is of his goodness; it seems reasonable to conclude, that one, possibly the chief end of creating those things, was, to shew God to man.

MOST of the productions of the earth, are one way or another for the use of animals. Many animals are the food of other animals ; and, to be sure, so intended by the Maker. Man, as an animal, has his share of the leguminous, as well as of animal food. Every living creature wants nourishment, and finds it ready provided ; but all have not eyes to see the bountiful hand that reaches it. Man has his provision in common with the other animals ; but then he has eyes that may, and, if he do not shut them, must see the hand from which it comes. On the brute therefore, who cannot know his benefactor, there is no obligation to duty or gratitude ; on man, who may and ought to know, there is and must be. Why then may it not be fairly concluded, that one of the chief ends of crowding the earth with so many wonders of the vegetable and animal kind, is, to fill the head of man with admiration, and his heart with gratitude ?

IT is rash to say, that the bee knows, or makes use of any geometrical principles in the
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formation of its hexagonal cells ; or that it is from any physical knowledge of the properties of flowers, that it is directed to cull the sweets that yield its honey from some, neglecting others. It is rash to affirm, that the various tribes of spiders consider, and, from reflexion and by mechanical rules, frame those nets of different forms and sizes, that catch their vagrant prey. It is rash to suppose, that the swallows, the crows, the magpies, frame their nests, and make choice of that situation, from any antecedent reasoning what is fittest to be done, or from any architectonical notions. It is neither reflexion nor hunger that moves the cat to lie in wait so patiently and so attentively for the mouse or the rat. These actions they exert, probably because they are directed by their frame to exert them ; and to that disposition we give the name of *instinct*.

It is false to say, that men desire to eat and drink, from knowing that doing so is necessary to preserve their lives ; or that they have a desire for the other sex, from a design of propagating

pagating the species. These dispositions flow from their make: they hunger, they thirst, they lust, whether they would or would not. In these things, and some others, they are moved by their frame as brutes are.

BUT, laying aside these natural, or rather mechanical dispositions, man compared with brutes is much at a loss, except in so far as reason and reflexion come to his assistance. He has no instinct to determine him what to eat, what to avoid eating. It is but a small part of the globe, if any, that can afford man fruits or legumes to support him the whole year round. His make is not fit for catching animals to live on, were he naturally carnivorous. No instinct such as appears in other animals, directs him to this or that sort of habitation; and were he not directed by experience and reflexion, he must quickly perish.

MAN comes into the world much more helpless, and continues so much longer than any other animal we know. Without
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the care of his parents he must be soon lost; and without the instruction which their experience enables them to afford his reason, he must continue miserable, until his own experience and observation yield matter for his reason to work on. He therefore was evidently so framed, as to be obliged to follow reason for his guide; whereas all the other animals had their guide in their texture and constitution.

No animal but man wants cloathing, other than nature has provided for it. Man can hardly live in any part of the globe, unless he find cloathing for himself.

No animal but man stands in need of cookery, or any other preparation for his food, but what it has from nature. Man must prepare every thing almost, except fruits and legumes, before they are fit for his service. Grain must be ground and baked; all sort of meat must be altered in its condition by fire; and I doubt salt must by industry be found or made, before the nourishment be proper for man.

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No climate yields spontaneously food sufficient for man, though all do for the brutes that inhabit them. Man does not cultivate the ground, nor find supplies for his wants, from instinct, but from observation and reasoning.

REASON in him must answer the end of instinct in brutes. He sees trees and all vegetables spring from seeds; if he would have plenty, he must plant or sow. He sees grains and fruits fall and perish, unless they are gathered and preserved; and he sees the ant industriously gathering and laying up stores. These observations must lead him to produce and save corns, &c. Cold makes cloathing necessary; the spider's thread and web furnish matter for his fancy, and spinning and weaving are invented. Floods, and storms, and winter make shelter necessary. The swallow makes use of mortar, the crow of sticks for its nest: man's invention improves on their instinct; at first huts rise, and at last palaces.

INSTINCT

INSTINCT carries brutes no farther than to what is fit and necessary: Reason carries man so far; but then it, or at least it prompted by vanity, carries him much farther. In place of warm cloathing, which nature requires, vanity will have it rich and gaudy. The blush of the rose, the plume of the peacock, and the shining wing of the butterfly, must be imitated to deck our fine Ladies, and our much finer young Gentlemen. In place of convenient mansions, we must have sumptuous palaces, crufted with marble, and shining with gold. In place of food fitted for our stomachs by roasting and boiling, we run into the most ridiculous gratification of extravagant taste, by unnatural mixtures, that distress the stomach. And in place of using wine, and strong drink, our own invention, for necessary purposes, if any such there are, we make them the instruments of debauch, the means of debasing our understanding, and destroying our health.

HAPPY brutes! unhappy man! Their instinct carries them to what is fit and conve-

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nient for them; but it carries them no farther; it leads them to nothing that undoes them. His Reason supplies in him the lack of instinct, and leads him to every thing that is necessary or convenient; nay, bounds him to that when duly made use of. His Reason, besides supplying the place of instinct, was clearly intended for opening to him a scene of very delightful employment; the contemplation of the works of God, the reflexion on his boundless might, wisdom, and goodness, and the enjoyment of his favour. But unluckily this last has long ceased to be any part of his business. His Reason is made use of indeed, by all means, whether right or wrong, to purchase things necessary and convenient; but he does not stop there. He seldom ever makes use of it to prevent the abuse of these conveniences: on the contrary, he employs it in contriving means to raise and to gratify unnatural appetites, by which his constitution is hurt. And he seems to have no other view in the conduct of his life, but to satisfy those vicious and destructive inclinations, which he himself has raised, and substituted in
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the room of those which Reason was intended to lead him to.

BRUTES are by nature sufficiently supplied with necessaries, and with Instinct to teach them to make use of them; and if they had eyes to see the Author of nature, they surely would be thankful. Man is richly supplied by nature; and, in place of Instinct, has Reason to teach him to apply to his use and convenience what nature has produced. He has besides eyes to see the Author of nature, and of his blessings, the giver of that Reason that helps him to turn the product of the earth to his account; and he has in his make a disposition to gratitude, as well as he knows, that acknowledgment, thankfulness, and compliance with the will of his Maker and Benefactor, is his duty. But, alas! how seldom does he suffer that disposition to be brought by Reason to act? How little is he employed in thinking on nature, with a view to discover and admire its Author? and how small is his concern for the will, for the honour of that Being by whose power and bounty he subsists?

BECAUSE he can raise plants, and gather fruits and seeds; because he can convert these seeds and fruits into bread and wine; because he can manufacture silk, wool, and flax; because he can smelt minerals, and produce a sort of new species of metals; and because he can, by making use of his Reason, procure a vast variety of gratifications to his taste, and to his vanity, he forgets the Being whose gift that reason was: he is apt to look upon himself as the creator of all those things that afford him subsistence or gratification, and on them as his creatures: he thinks it lawful to make use of his own to any excess: and he at last drops into an opinion, that true felicity consists in the gratification of all appetites, at any expence, without regard to right or wrong; and that every thing that may safely be done to compass that gratification, is lawful.

WHEN this comes to be the settled disposition of the mind; when the bias of the heart is the gratification of all lusts and appetites; when the gratification of these lusts and appetites

tites is directly adversary to what right Reason says is the will of God, and inconsistent with what it says would have been our chief felicity, even in this life, had we pursued it; no one can wonder, that right Reason is not consulted, or its voice listened unto; or that the crowd, especially of the giddy and vitious, shun all correspondence with Reason, all sort of meditation; and in place thereof, when they are satiated with the gratification of grosser appetites for the time, and cannot proceed farther in the enjoyment, they take up with play, or other the most silly, if not offensive amusements, rather than be left alone in the hands of their own conscience and reflexions.

THUS has Reason, the highest gift that God has been pleased to bestow on men, by the perversity of foolish guilty man become the instrument of his misery. Reason was given him, in place of instinct, to direct his choice; which was left free, that he might deserve, and be rewarded for doing well: Reason was given, to guard him against the prevalence

prevalence of lusts and appetites, and to lead him to the chief felicity his nature was capable of: Reason was given, to let him see the order, the beauty, and the magnificence of the works of God; and thereby to discover the excellency, the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of that self-existent Being: Reason was given, to shew him his immediate dependence on his Creator, for every blessing he enjoyed, as well as the capacity of enjoying them; and to fill his soul with gratitude for the overflowing bounty of his Maker: And Reason was given him, to complete and secure his felicity, by a settled confidence in the favour and protection of the Almighty, so long as he made use of it to controul and correct disorderly appetites; and to answer the end of his creation, in admiring, reverencing, and adoring that source of perfection, mercy, and goodness. But, alas! to what miserable purposes has wretched man employed this mighty boon of heaven! Reason, in place of restraining, has been made use of to encourage lusts and appetites, by inventing incentives to them: In place of leading men
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to see their duty, and the true object of their felicity, it has been employed in contriving means to divert the attention from looking at either: Nay, in place of discovering the boundless perfections of God, the absolute dependence of man, and the necessary connexion between right and wrong and rewards and punishments, it has been fatally made use of to hide the Deity from the sight of men, to erect man into an independent being, to abolish all hopes and fears of rewards or punishments, and to make felicity consist in what is truly the dishonour of the human nature.

AMAZING as this phænomenon is, nothing is more certainly true; nor has any effect in nature a more shameful, a more pitiful cause.

APPETITES were given to man, to prompt him to preserve himself, and to continue the species. The natural calls to eat, to drink, to propagate the species, were necessary; else man employed in contemplation, would soon have ceased to be. The acts of eating, drinking,

ing, copulating, without the natural stimulus, have nothing inviting in them. And it is an instance of the benignity of the Creator, that the gratification of those necessary appetites is attended with a very sensible pleasure, which rewards the obeying of nature's call; as it is an instance of his wisdom, that when the ends of these natural calls are answered, satiety ensues, and the objects coveted lose their charm, and cannot be so much as thought of with any relish, until nature has farther occasion for them.

THE desire of knowledge, the effect of discerning and reasoning, was implanted to prompt man to employ those faculties by which the Deity, and what is owing to him, might be discovered. And here again the goodness of the Divine Being is manifest, in annexing to the gratification of that desire the calmest and most lasting satisfaction, without that alloy which attends the gratification of their other, carnal, appetites; and with this singularity, that the desire of knowledge is insatiable, and, like its object, infinite; re-
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warding nevertheless the seeker after knowledge with very sensible pleasure in every step of his pursuit.

THE desire of preserving life, (not to speak of the natural impulse to avoid ill), is the result of the pleasures and enjoyments of both kinds provided for man in this life.

AND the desire of approbation, is the incentive planted in man by his Maker, to dispose him to do his duty; which is immediately rewarded by the calm satisfaction that warms his heart upon having done it. The approbation of the Author and Maker of all things, must be of infinite consequence to the creature; and the consciousness of having gained that approbation, must yield the purest joy.

THE other dispositions, or what are called passions of the mind, such as anger, fear, love, hatred, &c. have been placed in man for noble, and for salutary ends; not only as they respect man's duty to the Deity, but as

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they regard society: though those also, as man has unhappily contrived the matter, in place of promoting the ends for which they were meant, hurry man on to misery, and give birth to many disorders in society.

Now, thus qualified for happiness, what has man done to enjoy, or to preserve it? Why truly, finding an immediate pleasure attendant upon the gratification of sensual appetites, he is disposed to place his happiness in them: Finding that pains and industry must be used to supply what his appetites crave, he bestows all his time and action in that pursuit: Finding that, employing his reason, he can refine upon the common gratification of those appetites, by inventing new meats, new drinks, new sauces; by procuring variety of women; by erecting palaces; by picture; by sculpture; by musick; and by numberless arts, to please and to amuse, his Reason is made use of to those purposes only: And finding that, by the use of Reason, he can not only arrive at those things, but that, though he is far from being the strongest of animals, he, by employing

ploying it, is more powerful than they are all put together; that he is their lord and master, and they subservient to his uses; that he can blow up rocks, alter the course of rivers, lock up the sea in basons, join, in a manner, distant continents by ships; that he can imitate thunder, and lay whole countries waste; and that those things he can do without any immediate controul or check from the Author of nature; he is apt to think he owes all these advantages and prerogatives to himself, and to that Reason which distinguishes him from the rest of the visible creation; and, on that supposal, to conclude, that no return of duty or gratitude is due to that superior Being, from whom his Reason and all his real enjoyments flow.

As the firm belief of this conclusion is absolutely necessary towards quieting his mind, in the career of brutal folly in which he is engaged, Reason, that unfortunate tool, is made use of on every occasion to blind its owner. It was given by the Creator to be his guide; and it ought to be so: if duly

made use of and attended to, it would be so. But, as man has contrived to manage matters, it is listened to only when it suggests what is fit to sooth him in his foolish shameful courses. On such occasions it is the sole and sovereign rule. But if it presumes to check him; if it insinuates, that he is no more than a poor dependent creature, debtor to the supreme Being, and consequently accountable for every talent, every blessing, every enjoyment; that suggestion is straightway treated as the offspring, not of manly Reason, but of mean dastardly fear; a melancholy conceit, nursed up in sickly imaginations; which had its origin in certain inventions of cunning lawgivers, who, to keep their people in order, and in obedience to the laws established by them, published notions of right and wrong, and of rewards and punishments, which, conveyed down by tradition, have gained credit with the weak, to the great disturbance of their quiet, and pass for realities with enthusiasts. Unhappy man! Fatal effect of prejudice: Reason, the sovereign rule, is to be followed, and allowed that name, or rejected, and

and called the fruit of melancholy or enthusiasm, as it does or does not conform itself to prejudices.

BUT what is the most amazing on this article is, that in proportion as men are, or imagine they are possessed of knowledge, and of the art of reasoning, in an eminent degree, their abuse of that knowledge, and of the reasoning faculty, to the prejudice of the end to which it was chiefly meant, is the more conspicuous. In ancient times, which are now called times of ignorance, when men did not pique themselves on the deep knowledge, and the profound skill in reasoning, which we boast of at this time, there was a general disposition to reverence the Creator, and a professed infidel was hardly to be met with. But, in these our days of supposed knowledge, the guise is sadly changed. Except amongst those called ignorant, not many are to be found that do, or pretend to believe in God.

FROM the beginning, a rational being, unaided

aided by learning, and the experience of former ages, could easily discern the hand of an intelligent, wise, powerful, and very bountiful Creator, in the whole and in every part of the fabrick of this system that fell under his ken; and could as easily discover his own obligations to, and his dependence on that Being. And accordingly we see, by the earliest accounts of time that have come to our hands, all mankind, full of a persuasion of their dependence, full of reverence to the Deity, soliciting his favour and protection by prayer, by ceremonies, by sacrifices, sometimes human, nay of their first-born; and imputing all their favourable or cross incidents that happened to them, to the goodwill or displeasure of the sovereign Being, whom it was their chief study to placate.

IT is true, that the notions they generally entertained of the Deity were imperfect, as well as their manner of serving him corrupted; circumstances that can easily be accounted for from the weakness and perverseness of those who took the lead in directing their religious

ligious opinions and practices. But still it is undeniably true, that the gross of mankind were serious in their belief of the existence of a Deity, of their dependence on him, and of the occasion they had for his protection and favour.

To this general disposition of mankind it was in part owing, that the gospel, upon its first publication, made so rapid and so surprising progress. No man at that time doubted of the existence of a Deity, or of man's dependence on him. It was easy to satisfy every one who admitted these propositions, that mankind, by the corruption into which they had fallen, stood mightily in need of some intercessor, some mean by which they might be saved from the weight of their sins. And it is no marvel, that evidence given to men so convinced, that salvation might be had through JESUS, should be received with gladness.

AND accordingly we see, that, in a trifle of time, the herd of mankind, in defiance of
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all discouragements, and of the most severe persecutions, from power, greedily embraced and professed this faith; and continued steadfastly in the profession of it, notwithstanding the monstrous absurdities with which the teachers of that faith loaded it, and the more monstrous and shocking lives and manners of the teachers; until of late years, that what ought to have been improved into a blessing to mankind, has unfortunately turned out to their destruction.

IN the period just mentioned, wicked and voluptuous men pursued wicked and voluptuous courses; and many gross villanies and abuses were daily committed by profligate men, which the degenerate condition of mankind produced. But still these wickednesses were disguised, disowned, or some how sought to be atoned for. The villain dissembled at least, and was forced to be so mean as to become a hypocrite. No man dreamed of professing openly, that he denied the being of a God, or his dependence on, and being accountable to him. And if any one was indeed

deed so foolish, as well as impious, as to entertain such a notion, (which by the by is with me a question), there was no temptation for uttering it; because there was no chance that any one should concur in supporting such an opinion.

BUT of late the case is surprisingly, and sadly altered, by the very mean that ought to have produced the contrary effect; increase in knowledge, from the more careful observation of nature, and from the perusal of the works of the learned in all ages.

WHATEVER degree of acquisition of knowledge from experience, the longevity of the antediluvians might have rendered practicable for any particular person, it is certain, that the short period to which mens lives are now, and have for some thousands of years been limited, does not permit any individual to lay in any considerable stock of knowledge. And if he will know much, he must profit of others, his contemporaries; or of those that went before him, by tradition, or by writing.

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HENCE all arts have been perfected by degrees. The experience of one age adds to that of another. And if the discoveries of our forefathers had not been handed down to us by writing or tradition, we should be as rude and unlearned as the most barbarous of them were.

AFTER writing became fashionable among the ancients, the experience, the reasoning, and discoveries of one age, were transmitted to, and improved on by the next. The inquisitive became diligent in perusing the discoveries of former times: philosophy became mightily in vogue; and it was no uncommon thing for men of parts, to dedicate their whole time to the contemplation of nature, and to place their whole felicity in employing all their mental faculties in the investigation of truth.

As pursuits of this kind are of all others the most noble, and the most suited to a rational being, they soon became the most honourable. Philosophers were held to be *wise men,*

men, and were called so *tout court* ; as undoubtedly they held themselves to be, though modestly they contented themselves with the appellation of *lovers of wisdom* only : and the vanity they had in being very much more knowing than other people, and in being thought by others *wise*, was the chief reward they had for their labour, and contributed not a little to run them into the vain opinion, that they were in very deed *wise*, and that their skill and wisdom could answer all purposes.

IN all arts and sciences, so far as the observations they were possessed of afforded materials, they reasoned accurately. In morality, and the whole system of duties which men owe reciprocally to each other, and which members owe to the society whereof they are part, they acquitted themselves well. Brutal appetites and enjoyments they saw, and reproached the meanness of ; the superior happiness which the right exercise of the understanding yields, they felt and recommended. Reason, in contradistinction to appetites

and passions, was their sovereign guide; and felicity was to be attained by following its dictates. Social and publick virtues had, according to their notions, charms sufficient to make the possessor of them happy, and to secure against all wants, pains, and distresses.

BUT though their sagacity and attention discovered and described the beauty of virtue, and the deformity of vice; though they defined with precision the limits of social and political duty; and though it was the labour of their lives, to recommend what was good, and to dissuade from what was evil: yet it unluckily so happened, that the learning and reason which they valued themselves upon, never once led them to the reflexions for which they were principally intended, on the excellencies and manifest attributes of the Author of the creation, on the necessary dependence of man upon his favour, and on the duty thence resulting to the Deity. Such reflexions would have been fit to humble their vanity, and to have checked them in the course of pursuits, which though not openly vicious,

vitious, yet had nothing of that reverence and attention that is due to the Deity mixed with them.

So soon as these wise philosophers had got that quantity of knowledge which in their apprehensions placed them above other men, and had got into a high opinion of their own Reason; they no longer employed their parts in attending to and investigating the wondrous effects of wisdom, power, and goodness, displayed in the fabrick of this universe, in order to raise high and honourable ideas of the Almighty, and becoming notions of man's meanness, short-sightedness, and dependence: but, rejecting such poor-spirited reflexions, they took it in their heads to imagine, that the profusion of wonders in the works of creation was intended only for an exercise to their understanding, to discover how, by what mechanism, and for what ends such things were brought about. They found out they had not power sufficient to produce them; but on the all-sufficiency of their Reason they depended: and therefore to work they

they went, to discover, and to explain nature. Hence so many *cosmogonea's*, so many systems for shewing how the various *phænomena* are performed. Some set out on *hypotheses* which time has discovered to be absolutely false. Some gave only words, which had no certain meaning, and therefore explained nothing; but which the philosopher and his followers were perfectly satisfied with. And all of them agreed in this, that their Reason was a match for the undertaking; that is, fit to investigate and describe all the mysteries of nature, and to discover and determine all the ways and works of God.

WITH this prepossession in behalf of the powers of their Reason, these wise Gentlemen undertook to inquire into the nature of God; laying it down as a fixed point, to admit no quality in that Being that their Reason did not assign him; nor to allow any action to him, but what they, making use of their Reason and observation, could assign the cause and end of.

ON these articles the difference of opinion was great. Some held the world to be eternal; and the infinite variety and contrivance, to be the effect of *Nature*, eternal also: and with this sound, in place of sense, they were satisfied. Some held the world to be the work of an intelligent Being: but the number of them was few; and what regard he had to men in the composition, they did not say. Some held that the Deity directed events in this world, particularly those that regarded nations and societies: others utterly denied Providence; and imagined, that every thing was left to the government of Chance. Few philosophers allowed of a future state of rewards and punishments: those that did, thought only of rewarding publick virtues, and punishing vices noxious to society. None of them imagined, that God ever minded the inward disposition, or heart of man.

As *Epicurus* and his followers observed, that no signal punishment attended vice in this world, they denied Providence; as they could not be satisfied that the dead could rise,
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they denied a future state ; and as there was no punishment that actually attended vitious actions in this world or another, all actions with them were indifferent. So that this sect, which was numerous, discarded the Deity, and made brutes of men.

BUT it is impossible they could have dropt into such monstrous absurdities, if the vain voluptuous course in which they were engaged, had not given a bias to their Reason ; and if they had not made Reason so much the test and touchstone of all things, as to reject every thing which it could frame any objection to, if it could not also, by its own light, dissolve that objection.

HAD they duly attended to the popular opinions which prevailed in their days, that the gods regarded the actions of men ; that good actions were pleasing, and evil displeasing to the Deity ; that sins, unless expiated, were to be punished ; and that rewards and punishments were to be met with in another state : had they with care considered

ed the essential difference between good and evil actions; the monstrous absurdity which attends the supposal, that wickedness can go unpunished, or virtue unrewarded; and the necessary consequence from thence, that there must be another time for those rewards and punishments, as they do not happen in this life: and had they permitted themselves to see, without prejudice, the numberless obligations, unacknowledged and unreturned, under which man lies to his Creator and Preserver, and the infinite disproportion there is between our weak scanty Reason and his boundless wisdom, it is impossible they could have fallen into a set of such childish opinions as they maintained.

BUT they were too much bewitched with the chimerical notions they had of their own excellency; too fond of the character they had carved out for themselves, after driving the Deity from their thoughts, of being lords of the creation, the chief of beings, accountable to none, happy in themselves, intitled to gratify every appetite, and subject to no

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law but that of their own good-will and pleasure, to submit to the mortification that must result from the discovery of their real state. The misery into which folly had plunged human nature, must be a disagreeable object of contemplation to a vain man who had got himself into possession of the seat of God. The necessity of humiliation, repentance, amendment, intercession, and of a total alteration of views and pursuits, was a pill of no easy digestion. And therefore it is no great wonder, that though, on the first publication of the gospel, the good tidings were greedily received by the unlearned, and consequently less prejudiced, the philosophers, and their scholars, the pretended learned men of the world, resisted it with the greatest warmth and bitterness.

IT was however lucky, that though the infidelity of the ancient philosophers was almost as strong as that of the modern, it was by much less extensive; and therefore less mischievous. Learning in those days was confined to a few heads; books were scarce,
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and the purchase of them cost a great deal of money: every body did not meddle with philosophising, as they do at present; and, of consequence, knowledge of the philosophical kind was only to be met with amongst philosophers who taught, and such of their hearers as had leisure, genius, and books, to enable them to prosecute their studies. The herd of the people remained ignorant and undebauched; and the Christian doctrine, which took root amongst them, when it called in unprejudiced Reason, and learning to assist it, proved at last too strong for the few fantastick proud philosophers.

THUS was infidelity, that is, in theory and opinion, banished from the Christian world, till of late, that a false opinion has prevailed, that, with the restoration of learning, the knowledge of mankind has enlarged itself infinitely; that this is the effect of genius and Reason; and that making a proper use of this Reason, every thing that is, or appears to be mysterious in nature, may to a certainty, at least to a very high degree of

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probability, be discovered. And this false opinion has unfortunately become so prevalent and extensive, that, except amongst the meaner and the less conceited part of mankind, it is not easy to meet with any one that is not tainted with it.

THIS mischief is however by no means to be charged upon learning, but on the weakness and prejudices of mankind; who, conceiving too high an opinion of the powers of their own understanding, presume to measure every thing, divine as well as human, by it. For when first the subversion of the *Greek* empire drove learned men, with their books, into the west, which fell in with the time of the invention of printing, whereby knowledge was circulated, and could be come at much cheaper, and with less labour, than formerly, great numbers of men of genius applied themselves to study, and in a trifle of time acquired so much knowledge as disposed them to throw off the yoke, as well as the absurdities of the church of *Rome*; which would have had a thorough effect, but for the passions

ons and interests of selfish princes. But in this attack on the reigning church, infidelity had no sort of hand. Learning had warmed the piety, as well as it improved the knowledge of the Reformers: a thorough examination of the scriptures, of history, and of antiquity, independent of the tradition of the church, secured and defined their faith: and piety in those days was the companion of knowledge and learning; as it must ever continue to be where knowledge and learning are lodged in sober minds.

THE quick and easy conveyance of knowledge by the press, soon produced in all soils swarms of men of real or pretended learning. Curiosity, genius, or the fashion, (for it was the mode then to study), filled *Europe* with men of letters. Sciences of all sorts were pursued by people of all countries, as their tastes severally led them; all the ancient learning was exposed to view; in theology, the progress just described was made; the Roman law was studied, and taught with great accuracy; the *Greek* and *Roman* oratory and

and poetry became the standards of performances of that kind; the *Greek*, particularly *Aristotle's* philosophy, reigned in the schools; *Hippocrates*, *Galen*, *Celsus*, &c. gave lights to physicians, which they had not before; and the works of the ancient astronomers and mathematicians which remain, revived those studies; in which, by the assiduous application of ingenious men, very great progress has been made.

It must be owned, that, in almost every branch of learning, knowledge has been carried to a higher pitch, since the revival of learning, than it appears to have been by the ancients, from the remains of their works that have come to our hands. But that is not to be ascribed to the superiority of genius of the moderns; since the true cause of it can easily be assigned, *i. e.* That multitudes are at work on the same subject; and that the press affords so quick a conveyance of their conceptions and observations to each other, that they are thereby vastly aided in their lucubrations. Besides that many accidental discoveries

coveries by men not always of the brightest parts, have given hints, and struck out lights to the ingenious, which have led to considerable improvements, and have banished many false systems.

ACCIDENT gave birth to the invention of telescopes, and of microscopes; and yet to the first is owing the confirmation of the *Copernican*, and the ruin of the *Ptolomean* system; and to the second, the confirmation of *Dr. Hervey's* discovery of the circulation of the blood, as well as the production to view of numberless tribes of animals, hitherto hid from mortal sight. Accident gave birth to the invention of gun-powder, and of the air-pump; and experiments made on these have disclosed many unknown properties of the air. Experiments to which men have been led by accidents, have made surprising discoveries in chymy, and many parts of natural philosophy, to the great improvement of physick, and other branches of useful knowledge. And the accidental discovery of the *West-Indies*, and the intercourse by trade with it, and
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with the *East-Indies*, have brought numbers of particulars to light, to which the ancients were utter strangers.

POSSESSED of the learning of the ancients, with the vast addition of later discoveries, it is not to be wondered at, if the moderns exceeded the ancients as much in vanity, and the good opinion they entertained of their own capacity, as they did in knowledge. Hence they employed, with great industry, their time and their talents in searches after the secrets of nature, and in discovering and assigning the physical causes of the effects that shine forth in the universe. *Descartes's* new *Cosmogonia* beat *Aristotle's*, and all the other ancient systems, out of the schools. The artifice employed by the Creator, in the formation of the universe, in the direction, and the preservation of it, was described, and laid open to the comprehension of the meanest capacity; the physical causes of the ebbing and flowing of the sea, of magnetism, of the formation of metals, and of all the other seeming mysteries of nature, were assigned; and,

to the conviction of the inventers, and of almost all *Europe*, for about half a century, nothing was wanted but the application of his principles, to account for every *phænomenon*, how surprising soever, that should at any time make its appearance.

WHILST the world was drunk with this conceit, no marvel they should entertain a very high opinion of the sagacity of man. If his power was not to be compared with that of the Omnipotent, yet his wisdom and knowledge did not seem to fall far short of that of the Omniscient. A well-instructed and well-convinced *Cartesian* would not think himself hard put to it by the questions about the formation of natural things which the Almighty put to *Job*, to humble his pride, and to convince him, that he was not a competent judge of the ways and views of God. And thence it naturally followed, that they looked down, with some contempt, upon such parts of the scripture as appeared to them unphilosophical, entertained a poor opinion of the writers of them, and laughed at the simplicity

plicity of serious Christians, who believed several articles, in matters of religion, which those wise men could not account for so well, as they could for the formation of the universe, and the various *phænomena* of nature.

To this way of thinking their master's first principle led them. *Quicquid clarè & distinctè percipio, est verum*, was the foundation on which he built; and a good one. He surely run no risk in admitting whatever was founded on it. In all the parts of mathematicks, in which he excelled, the converting the proposition, and admitting nothing to be true but what one clearly perceives to be so, is the rule which has guided such as followed it to that degree of certainty which has distinguished those sciences from all others. The object of them admits of the application of the rule. Lines, angles, numbers, the creatures of man's imagination, defined by him, and receiving their nature from that definition, he may clearly conceive all the properties of; and is in the right to deny to any line, angle, or number, what he does not clearly perceive

ceive to belong to it. But if he carries this rule to other sciences, where the discovery of truth depends upon a different species of evidence: if he applies it to the works or ways of the Most High, which his knowledge does not reach to, as it does to the properties of lines and numbers, beings of his own creation; and of which he cannot possibly know any thing but what he gathers from conjecture, founded on the appearances in nature, or from what the Deity may have been pleased to reveal; monstrous mistakes may, and must grow. A thousand improbable, nay almost inconceivable things, in natural philosophy, are true. The testimony of the senses confutes all objections from improbability, or inconceivability, if one may use the expression; and credible evidence short of that of seeing or feeling, from unsuspected witnesses, creates that certainty on which men may safely depend and act. And if it has pleased the Almighty to discover to mankind any thing relating to himself or to his ways, it is but of little consequence, whether that falls in with the philosophers notions or conceptions; and

the only sensible question can be, Whether there is sufficient evidence that in fact such things were revealed?

NOTWITHSTANDING these obvious reflexions, *Monf. Descartes* and his followers, and the other sects of philosophers who have succeeded him, not content with world-making, have proceeded to god-making. They have presumed to define him, his attributes and powers; nay, they have determined what he is and must be, and what he is not and cannot be, with such precision and certainty, that if any thing said to be revealed by himself, does not conform directly to the character and qualities they have given this god, they straightway contest, and, right or wrong, reject the evidence for such revelation.

DESCARTES's romance kept entire possession of mens belief for full fifty years. If some cross experiment shocked it in some particular, the system was pieced up and mended by his followers, and accommodated to the new-discovered *phænomena*; till at
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last the tide of contrary observations and experiments was too strong to be resisted. All the invention of his countrymen the *French*, could not prop the theory that experiment demonstrated to be false: and what was worst of all for *France*, it was crushed under the weight of another theory, built on the discoveries of Sir *Isaac Newton*, an *Englishman*.

THE sagacity of Sir *Isaac* was admired by all, and adored by his countrymen. His genius pushed him to discoveries in the most abstruse parts of the mathematicks, that have caused the astonishment of the learned; and at the same time, from accurate observations made on nature, he has given hints, which, though by him flung out in the form of queries only, his countrymen have converted into so many certain propositions; and upon them have founded what they pretend to be a compleat theory or system, which future experiments and discovery must try the solidity of. But it must be owned Sir *Isaac's* modesty was much greater than that of his followers, not only in the title he gave to his notions,
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but in the respect with which, notwithstanding his vast genius and superior knowledge, he treated the Deity and the scriptures.

It is truly amazing, that the series of blunders which the most exalted geniuses who applied themselves to system-making have by late discoveries been found to have dropt into one after another, has not cured the philosophers of our time of the high conceit they have entertained of the compass and all-sufficiency of the human understanding, and of the madness of the undertaking, to trace, with the organs which we have got, the hidden wonders of the material creation; especially, since the more light we gain into natural things by accidental discoveries, the thicker the difficulties pour themselves on us, and the more inexplicable these mysteries appear to be.

ABOUT the beginning of the last century, natural philosophers had nothing to exercise their talents on, but such *phænomena* as fell within their senses, unaided by instruments, and

and such observations as were without very great care or accuracy made accidentally on such things as gave surprise on account of their singularity. But since that time, the microscope has unveiled a sort of new creation, at least a very remarkable part of it, till then unknown; the telescope has discovered new worlds in the skies; and improvements in mathematicks and astronomy, have shewed the size and distance of those worlds. The inconceivable minuteness of the microscopick animals, of the parts whereof they are composed, of their juices and nutriment, and the delicacy of the artifice that has produced and supports them, strikes the mind with as strong a sense of the plenitude of skill and power of the Creator, as the grandeur and magnificence of the new discoveries in the skies does of his immensity; and both are equally fit to give to man the most humbling view of his own knowledge and penetration, as well as of his power, when compared with those of the Almighty.

THE air-pump, experiments made therein,

in, and others to which these gave rise, have discovered many properties of the air, heretofore unknown, which shew the admirable sagacity of that Being by whose astonishing contrivance that fluid is so adjusted and tempered, as in effect to support the animal as well as the vegetable world, and to maintain this part of the creation in the condition in which it is.

CHEMISTRY pursued with attention, has discovered many effects of fire, and of mixtures, and general properties in metals, minerals, and other bodies, that give daily surprise; Anatomy has to a certain pitch laid open the astonishing artifice of the Creator, in the texture of the body of man, as well as of other animals; a prism in Sir *Isaac Newton's* hand has disclosed many qualities in light, which never had entered into the heart of man to think of; and some accidental experiments in Electricity have presented to the senses, appearances which shew, that there are some powers and properties in matter not hitherto dream'd of,

of, and which no theory as yet hatched can account for.

THE natural effect of those discoveries upon minds rightly disposed, ought to be, to mortify self-conceit, and to exalt our idea of the infinite power and perfection of the Creator; since the greater progress we make in discovering, the more wonders of contrivance, wisdom, power, and goodness we meet with, which though our Reason can sometimes see the end of, it is too scanty to trace the mechanical cause of; and for that must resort to the will and pleasure of the Deity, unless we will be so absurd as to say, that nature, without any meaning or contrivance, has bestowed those properties and powers upon certain parcels of matter.

THAT dense bodies gravitate in proportion to their mass, and that projected bodies continue in motion until obstructed, are appearances so common, that no one is surprised with the observation; and the crowd do not trouble their head in inquiring after the

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causes. But it is not so with the clear-sighted philosophers. They must puzzle their brains with assigning the mechanical causes for those effects; and when they have done their best, they must confess their ignorance, or risk error, by averring that there is no mechanical cause; and that the effect depends on a law of nature, which those who are disposed to be civil to the Deity say, flows from the mere will of the Deity.

IN the same way, every man living is sensible of the intimate connexion between the soul and the body; he feels the sensation raised in the one by the action of the other, and knows the ready obedience which such parts of the body as are intended for action yield to the will of the soul: but how the one acts upon the other, is not only not known, but, one may venture to say, not knowable or conceivable by us, until we acquire some degree of knowledge of what we are at present mere strangers to, the nature of *Soul*, and the nature of *Body*.

A body fit to reflect light and colours, when placed in light, not only returns the rays of light that fell upon it, to the luminous body that enlightened it, but sends the picture of itself quite round the hemisphere in all directions, and to every point; placing a thousand, a million of such bodies near one another, each performs the same operation: the rays of light and colours come instantaneously to the spectator's eye from each, without being disturbed or diverted in the passage by the numberless rays returned, in different and contrary directions, by the other contiguous bodies. That the Being who contrived this mechanism, and created the machine, can explain it, and can give us capacity to comprehend it, is not to be doubted: but until it shall be his good pleasure to do so, all we have to do is, to admire his power and skill, and thankfully to acknowledge the blessing he has bestowed upon us by this astonishing machinery.

WHY then, what has man got by the numerous experiments and discoveries of later

years? Why, surely, a more accurate and certain knowledge of many *phænomena* of nature, of many of the works of God, than the ancients had, and a more distinct view of the ends and uses of many pieces and parts of the creation than men were formerly possessed of: discoveries fit to raise the most high and honourable notions of the Creator, and of his goodness to his creatures; and to convince man of his short-sightedness, dependence, and duty.

BUT has man made this improvement of those discoveries? Nothing less! He makes a pompous muster to his own vain mind of his knowledge; he looks upon it as his property, acquired by his own ingenuity and industry; he prides himself on his sagacity, and hopes by its assistance to be still richer in wisdom; and he feels so much pleasure in the pursuit of more knowledge, and takes so much joy upon every trifling discovery which adds to his store, that he cannot think with patience on the evidence which his increase in knowledge gives of his real ignorance and weakness, nor
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on the infinite perfection and goodness of the Deity, which that knowledge demonstrates. Such reflexions would shock his vanity; would convince him he had passed his life unprofitably; and might determine him to quit his beloved course of philosophizing, or other courses still more foolish; or else to persist in them, under a load of anxious doubts which might pall the taste of his enjoyments.

HE must be a stranger to the exercise of the rational faculty, who does not know, that the pursuit of *knowledge* in any science is attended with very sensible pleasure; or who doubts, that a philosopher, if blessed with health, and means, and temperance, may reasonably propose to drive on in the career of life till nature decay, with as much satisfaction as any man who does not confidently look for a happy *hereafter*. And as this is the case, supposing a philosopher engaged in this pleasurable course, it is not to be imagined, that he would quit it willingly, or listen, without some reluctance, to doctrines that should make him uneasy in it. With such prejudice
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does almost every philosopher of our days attend to what he daily hears preached, and what the voice of all nature proclaims, of the duties which men owe to their Creator, of the regard which he expects from them to his will, and of the certainty of rewards and punishments; and is therefore fertile in objections, to prevent his own and other people's believing these truths.

AND what puts our age in a much more lamentable case than those that were before it is, that whereas the number of philosophers formerly was but very small, the number of pretended philosophers is now immensely great; and whereas books and learning were then in a few hands, at present almost every body can read. The press circulates books very cheap; philosophers from opinion, and wits for bread, publish Atheism; and the half-learned and vitious read. With these the authority of the learned, as well as the objections against doctrines which mens vices may induce them to wish not to be true, go far; and those of inferior learning

ing or rank are glad to follow the opinions, as well as the vices of their betters: so that a man that truly fears God, is at this day almost as great a curiosity as an Atheist was heretofore.

WHAT makes the truth of those reflexions the more sensible, is, that though those philosophers called *Freethinkers* controvert the duties owing to the Deity, and dream of no punishment attendant on the neglect; yet they all pretend to be, and generally are sensible of the social duties, and act up to them better than others do who in other respects think more justly than they. And this comes from the moral sense in them; which they rather encourage than stifle on that article, from the vanity of having the good opinion and approbation of mankind, which they court; and from this consideration, that it is no obstruction to their pursuits. Whereas, brought up with doubts of the very existence of the Deity; ripening into years, under a total neglect of all duties that may be owing to him; immersed in pursuits and courses
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whereof the objects are pretty much incompatible with those duties; and conscious, that such duties neglected, if there is any real obligation to them, must be highly offensive to the Deity, and attended with certain punishment; it is natural for them to wish they may have made no mistake in that article, and that they may not be found debtors to the divine justice. And it imports them very much, in respect to the future quiet and tranquillity of their lives, if they resolve to pursue the pleasures wherein they are engaged, to convince themselves, if they can, that all apprehensions of danger from neglect of duties to the Deity are but vain terrors, the device of priests, or the dreams of melancholy men.

BUT if there be such a thing as an intelligent Being, that has employed and displayed infinite wisdom, power, and goodness in the creation of this universe; that has with stupendous artifice stored this globe with every thing necessary, not only for the support, but for the felicity of man; that on all his works has stamped characters of the infinite perfections

tions and overflowing goodness of the Author; that has given to man, and to him alone of all the visible creation, that share of his goodness, eyes to be entertained with the magnificence, the beauty, the harmony, and the order of the universe; to see the perfection of the Creator in his works; and to discover the infinite obligations he lies under to, and the dependence he has on the goodness of his beneficent Maker; that has so moulded his heart and spirit, as to make pleasure attendant on admiration, and love and gratitude the necessary companions of the sense of favours received; and that has joined to the idea of ingratitude, the sensation of horror; and to consciousness of gratitude, an inward satisfaction, that even adds to the relish of the favour received: what could have been the view of the Creator in bestowing those eyes, and that disposition of heart and spirit? Was he or was he not to be discovered, admired, adored, loved, and revered; or was it indifferent to that perfect and beneficent Being, which way his creature employed his eyes, or disposed of his heart? And, on the

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other hand, how gross must be the folly and guilt of man, who, misemploying his eyes, and misapplying his heart, has refused to see the perfection of God in his works; and, in place of acknowledging with gratitude his obligation and dependence, chuses to be indebted to nothing but what he calls *Nature* and *Chance*, substituted by him in the room of God; and bestows his heart upon vanity, upon the creature in place of the Creator?

IF neglects and breaches of the social and moral duties are criminal even in the eyes of Freethinkers, what must be the guilt of neglecting the only duty, properly speaking, to God, of denying him the only return which he expects, because it is the only return he has qualified us to make, reverence, love, and gratitude? Ingratitude to men is marked with the blackest stain; what must then that vice be when it has for its object the source of all goodness? and what chance is there that it shall pass unpunished? It is astonishing, that men who justly look with such horror and detestation on murder and parricide, should think

think so coolly on the abnegation of the Deity; which denying him his tribute of reverence and gratitude is. But the instances of punishment which the magistrate, for the preservation of the society, inflicts, helps to keep up the idea of horror that attends the first; and the forbearance of vengeance in the latter, is by weak pretenders to Reason made an argument to conclude, that no offence is given.

IT is a strange imagination, to admit that men are formed with ideas of right and wrong, with a sense of duty and the contrary, and with full physical liberty to act as they shall best like; and yet to maintain, that it is absolutely indifferent to the Deity, who gave them that rule of conduct, whether they conform to or transgress it, whether they do right or wrong; and, consequently, that it is indifferent to them, if they escape punishment from their fellow-creatures, whether they have or have not conformed themselves to the rule of their Creator and Sovereign Lord.

THE excellency of the body, the capacity of the understanding, the extent of the knowledge of the most perfect of the human species, cannot possibly make any impression on the Deity, other than the general complacency that results from the survey of his works, and seeing that they are good. What a poor figure must the parts, the sagacity, and the knowledge of the admired Sir *Isaac Newton* make in the eye of the Omniscient? And how few *Newtons* can mankind boast of? These are therefore not the qualities that claim the Deity's regard. But if a rational creature, however limited in understanding, or imperfect in body, shall have his heart and spirit right disposed; shall see, and, in all his thoughts and actions, acknowledge his dependence on the God that made him; shall maintain in his heart a grateful sense of the numberless obligations he lies under to that bountiful Being, and shall be thoroughly disposed to make the *Will* of that Being the rule of his actions during the whole course of his life; regardless of the pleasures and sensual enjoyment which following this rule may

may deprive him of, and of the dangers and inconveniences to which pursuing it may expose him; in full confidence, that the sincerity of his heart will be acceptable to, and rewarded by the Creator, who endued it with such dispositions: we must necessarily conclude, either that the Omniscient does not know the dispositions and inward actions of the spirits of all his creatures, or that the grateful and dutiful heart of such a creature is pleasing and agreeable to him.

THUS the objects of the complacency of the Almighty amongst the children of men, may be as numerous as the individuals of the species. He has given to very few, those distinguishing parts that provoke the esteem even of their fellow-creatures; but he has given to all, hearts susceptible of reverence, gratitude, and love; and they have no more to do, but to employ those dispositions towards the proper object, to intitle themselves to the continuation of his goodness and good-will for them. It is remarkable, that the only thing which God claims of man in scripture is the *heart*; and
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it is remarkable also, that possession of the heart of any of our own, or even of the brute species, is what secures our affection in return. Persuasion of the friendship or love of any of our fellow-creatures, determines us to sentiments of the like kind for them; and we cannot help, when a dog, a cat, or any other familiar creature shews marks of any particular respect or fondness for us, to have pleasure in that fondness, and to cherish the creature in return. Now, though to limit the sovereign and self-existent Mind, by supposing that it has just such qualities and modifications as ours, would be rash; yet it would be rash also to assert, that there are not in it qualities and dispositions similar to such as are praise-worthy and commendable in our own. Nay, the contrary must be admitted by all who believe the scriptures; which assure, that God made man after his own image, and in every page declare his dislike of sin, and regard for piety.

BUT here lies the misfortune: This claim of the Creator to the hearts of his creatures cannot

cannot be complied with ; because they have already disposed of their hearts in another way. Lusts and follies of very different kinds have got possession of their spirits, and the gratification of those is the object of their pursuit. Multitudes follow the direction of the temperature of their body, and are slaves to the appetites that prevail in them ; which chain them to the oar they tug at, by the immediate pleasure they taste in obeying the call of those appetites ; whilst the very enjoyment of what they are so fond of, destroys the appetite, pulls on diseases and peevishness, with early old age and decay ; which must be attended with remorse and horror, if they do not carefully lock out from their thoughts all ideas of futurity, and of what ought to have been the object of their pursuits. To talk to such men of duty, whether in the career of their enjoyments, or when they are no longer capable of enjoying what their soul took delight in, is to preach to the deaf, at least to such as will undoubtedly stop their ears against sounds that must be so grating and disagreeable.

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AND, on the other hand, great numbers, who, from their constitution, education, or other circumstances, have escaped the enchantments of sensual pleasures, and have relished the delight that attends the exercise of their mental faculties, by much the most substantial, manly, and lasting enjoyment of the two, see, with regret and contempt, the brutish folly in which their fellow-creatures are engaged. They pity and despise those groveling mean souls, who never once tasted the refined satisfaction that results from employing the rational powers in the acquisition of knowledge, and the discovery of truth. And by how much soever the soul exceeds in excellency the body, by so much they look upon themselves to be better and happier than their brethren. In this they glory, in this they are really happy. In their own opinion they are wise, and they hope they are so in the opinion of all others. On the vanity that results from such an empty conceit they feed. They are glad to be thought wiser and better than they truly are. To gain the estimation of their acquaintance, they are charlatans

their heart, and yielding it entirely to the God that framed it, would be no easy spot of work; every power of their mind would be employed in defence of the idol they had carved for themselves. If religion had prescribed only prayers, penances, building of churches, or any other transient act, its language might have been listened to: but, as it will be satisfied with nothing less than the *heart*, which is already bestowed, no wonder philosophers are deaf.

To resist the evidence that pours in upon them, from nature, from revelation, from all quarters, in behalf of religion; and to stifle the apprehensions which it must naturally beget, they call in to their assistance that boasted Reason, which qualifies them to judge of God, and of all his works and ways. Him and them they try by that infallible touchstone; and if ought is proposed to be believed of either, which they cannot distinctly comprehend the manner or cause of, the proposition is immediately rejected, as absurd and impossible; or if any difficulty or objection

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occur to their imagination which cannot instantly be dissolved, the validity of the objection is straightway allowed, and the proposition to which it relates, is condemned. But this is not all. If the proposition condemned has revelation for its support, the whole of revelation, together with the evidence for it, are damned by the lump; because that cannot be the declaration of God, but must be a palpable forgery, which asserts any falshood, or, what is just the same, any thing that does not fall in with the notions of the learned and the wise.

THUS, because Freethinkers cannot conceive how a spirit can exist without a body, or how a body dissolved into dust, and dissipated, can be resuscitated, they doubt of a future state, and deny the resurrection; though these very wise men must admit, they have no adequate conception of the soul, or of its *manner* of existence or acting, or of the way in which it and the body were brought together.

IN like manner, what is called the *hypostatical union* in Christ, is rejected, because the *manner* of it cannot be comprehended by men; who must admit the union between soul and body in man, and must at the same time confess, they neither do, nor can, whilst they remain in their present condition, conceive how the one operates on the other.

THE doctrine of the Trinity shares the same fate; and with some more shew of reason; as, besides the difficulty of comprehending the *how* and the *wherefore*, in that doctrine, as commonly expressed, there is some appearance of contradiction in the terms, which makes it difficult to conceive what is meant to be believed. But this appearance of contradiction is owing, not to the revelation from which the knowledge of that history is derived, but to the vanity and folly of the doctors of the church; who, puffed up, even as the Freethinkers, with too good an opinion of their own parts, would take upon them to define what revelation does not; and to coin terms not made use of in scripture, to express

express their imperfect conceptions. The words *Trinity*, and *Person*, or *Hypostasis*, are terms not to be met with in the sacred book; and yet to those terms, and the application of them, the revolt against the doctrine is chiefly owing.

WHAT the scripture acquaints us with, is this, and no more: That what it characterises the FATHER, the avenger of wrong, and rewarder of right, is GOD; that what it characterises the SON, the WORD, the Creator of the world, the Redeemer of mankind, sent for that purpose by the Father, is GOD; that the HOLY SPIRIT, the correspondent with, and Comforter of the spirits of men, is GOD; and that nevertheless the DEITY, the SELF-EXISTENT BEING, is but ONE. That these matters are so, the scripture expressly declares; and the manner in which it expresses the last proposition, *Deut. vi. 4.* is worth attending to. Our translators render it, *Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD.* The original says, *JEHOVAH our Gods is one*
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SELF-EXISTENT BEING; for so the word translated *Lord* signifies. Now, what is there in our knowledge, in our conceptions, or in our reason, that can qualify us to determine the *modus* of the existence, or of the action of the invisible Deity? That we have no sort of idea of the substance of that soul which acts in us, or of the manner of its existence or actions, is an agreed point; what impudence then must it be in us, to pretend to determine, from our conceptions, or rather inability to conceive, the condition, or manner of existence and acting of the Supreme Being, the least of whose works are in very deed beyond our comprehension?

THE ancients, less refined than we, disputed about the figure and form of the Deity; and, knowing none more perfect or noble, as they apprehended, than that of man, bestowed upon the Deity a human shape and figure. The impropriety of this gross imagination we see; as we perceive, that the ideas of extension, shape, and figure, are not applicable to spirit, according to the idea which

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we have of it. But though we have not eyes to discover the substance or properties of spirit, does it certainly follow, that they have nothing in them analogous to shape or figure; no properties by which they can be discerned, and distinguished the one from the other, by God, or even by other spiritual beings, to whom he may have given eyes and understanding fit to perceive what we cannot? And is it not, on the other hand, clear, that there may be somewhat analogous to figure, some particular *modus* of existence of the Deity, of which our want of ideas will not permit us to form any notion?

HAD nature produced to our view such living creatures as wild fiction can present to our fancy, composed of three or more distinct bodies, absolutely separated from each other, without any bodily connexion, but actuated by one and the same principle, moving by one will, acting with one consent, each affected by the accidents that touch either, the one wounded by the blow that wounds the other, and all dying by the killing

ling of one; we should have had no distinct conception of what the scripture represents concerning the Deity. But then, habituated to the sight of such an extraordinary creation as has been mentioned, the scripture-doctrine would cease to be so shocking as it is to our wise men: and yet, from their knowledge of the machinery of nature, they will hardly take upon them to say, that the Deity could not have created such an animal as has been feigned.

IF this reflexion wants any further illustration, let the vision of *Ezekiel*, chap. i. & x. be considered. Four living creatures, which he knew to be the *Cherubim*, actuated by one spirit, moving with one consent whithersoever they would; attended by as many wheels, moving spontaneously in the same manner, because the *spirit* of the *living creature* was in them. This plurality and unity exposed in vision to the Prophet's view, must have lessened his difficulty against admitting the doctrine which so much offends our Freethinkers, because nothing resembling it
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has ever offered itself to their imagination. It is not necessary at present to inquire, how far the *Cherubim* was the emblem pitched upon by the Deity to represent the divine nature, with man united to what the lion in that hieroglyphical figure denoted. It is sufficient to observe, that if such living creatures had existed in nature, and had been seen and known, as the Prophet saw living and acting in vision, the mystery exploded by philosophers would not have been quite so incompatible with common notions as they pretend. And therefore it is absurd for wise men, to declare against a matter of fact asserted by the highest authority, for no other reason, forsooth, but that their observation or experience has presented them with nothing that should furnish an adequate idea of it.

UPON the same sort of principles, our modern reasoners reject the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction. They cannot conceive how the punishment of one who is innocent, should atone for the guilt of another. This to them appears to be contrary to the essential justice

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of the Deity, which ought not to take pleasure in the sufferings of the innocent; and productive of no good effect, suited to the character which they entertain of that exalted Being.

HERE again the temerity of those presumptuous men is notorious. That justice, according to our notions, will not condemn one for the fault of another, is manifest. But if the innocent should consent to suffer for the guilty, where is the violation of justice in permitting it? If the innocent again has some great and noble end in view by submitting to that suffering, fit to recompense a thousand-fold the grief borne, where is the injustice of permitting him to put himself in the place of the guilty? If the innocent person is all mercy, all bowels, all compassion, and can sustain the punishment which the broken-hearted repenting criminal cannot; what is shocking in the belief, even according to our common notions, that, to comply with the benignity of his nature, he might submit to bear it? It is true we may not see so clearly
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why the divine justice should be satisfied for the offence of one by the sufferings of another ; and that the light of nature would not have led us to discover, that we guilty offenders were to be delivered from punishment by the sufferings of another : but is that a reason why we should not take God's word for it, if he has been pleased to assure us that it is so ? Do we know so intimately the nature of his essential justice, as to be certain that it will not permit him to accept of a vicarious satisfaction ? Amongst men, we know, that debt owing by one may be discharged by payment made by another ; and are we certain, that, in the court of heaven, one man's obligation to justice may not be cancelled upon another's voluntary fulfilling of it ? He little thinks on the unmeasurable difference that is between the narrowness of the human understanding, and the immensity of the divine, who dares rest on such conclusions.

ANOTHER instance of mens making their own confined observations and conceptions the measure and touch-stone of truth, is, the

prevailing opinion that discards providence, denies a future state, and consequently renounces the Deity, at least deprives the first cause of all intelligence.

THIS notable opinion is grafted on observation, that the Deity does not interpose in any extraordinary manner in the transactions of this lower world; that every thing proceeds in it according to the concurrence of natural causes; that the same events befall the wicked as the virtuous, with the advantage most commonly on the side of the vicious; that the strongest battalions, conducted by the best officers, succeed in battle; and that vice and villany is triumphant, when conducted by skill, without any appearance on the part of God in providence to prevent the effects of the wickedness, or to correct the authors of it: and from these observations the collection is, that all actions are indifferent, and that a future state is a bugbear.

Now, supposing these observations precisely true, and that there is not the least interposition

position of the Deity in this world, what is the necessary consequence? Whether that all actions are indifferent, in flat contradiction to the clearest feeling and perception of the soul; or that there must be a future state, in which the actors must severally be distinguished by rewards and punishments? If there are such things as right and wrong, if the Deity is intelligent, and if justice is an attribute of that Being, the last must necessarily be the true conclusion. But as the admitting it might be attended with some uneasy apprehensions, and might require a change of heart and conduct, the moral sense, the most intimate conviction, must be smothered, and intelligence and justice denied to the infinitely perfect Being.

BUT, after all, on what is this important proposition, That the Almighty has absolutely abandoned all sublunary things to the direction of chance, founded? Why just on this, That none of our wise men have seen any miracles wrought of late times; and they are not disposed to think it possible, that any could have been wrought in the more early;
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and it is a truth not to be contested, that the unjust succeed in this world, fully as well as the just.

BUT if they were to be asked, Whether they are certain, that no cause has interposed in the producing any event but what they have observed? and whether they are sure, that there are no secret springs in providence, unseen and unthought of by them, to which important events are owing? if they would not be laughed at, they must answer in the negative; which is enough to destroy the certainty of their position.

BUT to examine the thing more carefully, they must distinguish between individuals of the human species, and states and kingdoms; which by us are considered in some sort as individuals, and may be so by the Ruler of the universe. Though men be not punished or rewarded here, they may meet with what they deserve hereafter. But if states and kingdoms are not to meet with any correction in
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this world, they cannot be considered as proper objects of it in another.

Now, it is a certain truth, that all states and kingdoms, in proportion as they grow great, wealthy, and powerful, grow wanton, wicked, and oppressive. And the history of all ages gives evidence of the fatal catastrophe of all such states and kingdoms, when the cup of their iniquity was full: nor is it possible to shew, that any one state or kingdom has been overturned that did not deserve it at the hand of Providence; however little they may have deserved it at the hand of the tyrant or oppressor who brought their calamity upon them. In this argument it is not necessary to say, that no unjust war ever prospered. Providence may make use of the vitious and wicked disposition of any prince, or of the ruler of any state, to execute justice upon a power fated to punishment. And the only question which the adversaries to Providence have to answer, is, How they can be sure, that those deserved judgments were the effect of mere fortuity,

fortuity, without the least intervention on the part of the Lord of the universe ?

THE course of providence with respect to individuals of the human species undergoes a very different consideration, and ought to be viewed in a light which no Freethinker ever thought of. If by happiness and prosperity in this world is meant, wealth, and power, and enjoyment of all pleasures, and success in all pursuits; it may be safely allowed, that the best man is not the happiest or most prosperous: but if by happiness and prosperity is meant, the full and quiet enjoyment of all the pleasures that man, considered as a rational being, is capable of; and success in all the pursuits in which, as a reasonable creature, he ought to engage; there is no doubt, that the good man will be found to be the most compleatly happy; and with that good man as little doubt, that the Maker and Sovereign Lord of man has not abandoned the care of him to blind chance.

THE man who, forgetting all regards for
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the Author of his being and happiness, centers all his views upon himself; who, born with a vigorous body and keen appetites, succeeds to, or acquires means to gratify all his brutal desires, and plunges into the enjoyment of whatever his lust directs him to, is not, in the eyes even of the most freethinking philosopher, happy. His pursuits, as well as his enjoyments, are mean and beastly; surfeits and accidental diseases interrupt the course of his felicity; age, with its attendant infirmities, dissolve the charm that bound him; pleasures of all sorts lose their relish; and the terrors which death unavoidable must bring, are no way to be evited, but by banishing all thoughts of death from the mind. Such a man's possessions and enjoyments cannot denote him happy; nor would a wise man pray for these blessings as the portion with which he was to be contented, unless he might obtain this other boon, that he should never decay nor die.

No philosopher that breathes the air, is so silly as to maintain, that the objects of the
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pursuits of the avaritious, or of the ambitious, whether in the political or martial way, are objects fit for the pursuit of a rational creature; or that success in those pursuits is fit to denote such a creature happy. And if they will take an impartial view of their own boasted felicity; if they will draw up a fair account of the sum of their learning and knowledge, and of the happiness they have tasted in the acquisition and enjoyment of those blessings; and if they will candidly set against it the discoveries they must have made of the scantiness of their knowledge, the weakness of their understanding, and their necessary dependence on somewhat not within themselves for their existence, which they never have thought fit to acknowledge; or, however, adding to those reflexions, the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of what may come after: the balance of the account will doubtless stand on the wrong side; and will shew, that though they have been more happy, or rather less miserable than the profligate of the higher or lower class of mankind, yet neither their pursuits nor acquisitions can give them
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any title to consider themselves, or to be considered by others, as really happy.

Now, on the other hand, let the case of that man be considered, who, delivered from the slavery of those vices and follies, and acquainted with the end for which he was created, endeavours with all his powers to answer the design. Such a one tastes the same pleasure in all sensual enjoyments as the greatest epicure; and has as quick a relish of all mental joys that proceed from the pursuit, or from the discovery of truth, as the greatest philosopher.

BUT then he sees, with the philosopher, that those sensual enjoyments are mean and beastly, unworthy of the pursuit of rational creatures; that they are annexed to the performance of the animal functions, to induce men to do acts necessary for their own preservation, and the propagation of the species; but which they never would think of, but for the appetites implanted in them, and the pleasure which attends the gratification of the

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appetites ; and that satiety and uneasiness accompanies the pursuit of those pleasures any farther than nature requires.

AND he sees, by the exercise of his rational powers, what few philosophers attend to, that the eyes of his mind were given him to discover the immensity, the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of the Creator in his works ; to discover the overflowing bounty of that perfect Being to him, and his constant dependence on the Author and Source of his happiness ; to discover the numberless obligations he lies under, with reverence and gratitude, to obey and to adore the Sovereign of the universe ; to discover his duty towards his fellow-creatures, as well as towards his Creator ; to discover, that the favour of the Almighty must attend performance of duty, as his displeasure must follow the ungrateful breach of it ; to discover, that the favour of God is the only object worthy of the pursuit of the heart of man ; and to discover, that the bestowing that heart, and all the desires of it, on sensual brutish pleasures, or any other
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ther vanity, to the exclusion of the *Eternal*, is the most horrid, as well as the most foolish crime that can be imagined.

THE pleasures of life are enjoyed by this man with as much, perhaps with more relish, than by the libertine. But then they do not pervert the heart. The only motion they are capable of exciting there, is, gratitude and thankfulness to the beneficent Donor. The acquisition of knowledge is tasted by him with as much delight as it is by the philosopher; though it produces in them very different effects. The one it puffs up with pride and presumption; the other it fills with humility, and reverence for the Most High.

THE man who has fixed his heart upon the proper object, does not cease to taste with pleasure the common blessings of this life; neither does he fail to bestow the proper industry to acquire, and to preserve them. But then he considers them only as so many sugar-plums given by the Creator to make his confinement to his prison of clay more palatable; which

which must have an end when his enlargement begins. He laments the unhappy condition of those who seek after them as their chief good. He would neither acquire nor preserve them at the expence of doing one single act that might forfeit the favour of his Maker and Benefactor: neither does he repine at the privation of them; knowing, that it could not happen without the will and pleasure of his Lord and Master, the Sovereign of the universe, to which his heart and will cheerfully submit.

COMPARE the happiness of this man with that of the greatest favourite of fortune, who has set his heart on other objects, and who has had the full gratification of all his appetites, so far as the course of humanity will permit; but who must die, and leave those enjoyments, uncertain what is to happen hereafter. This man enjoys, in common with the wise and the voluptuous of his rank in the world, all the sensual and mental pleasures in which they delight, without the alloy that must torture their minds, when they think

think of parting with them. But then he has in himself a constant source of unalloyed joy, to which they are utter strangers. The abundant goodness of the Giver of all those blessings, fills his soul with gratitude and thankfulness, and disposes him with joy to do what appears to him to be his duty; and consciousness of that happy disposition produces the most firm confidence and reliance on the favour and good-will of his omnipotent Benefactor; from which he is to look hereafter for joys of a different nature from those which in this life he flights, when they stand in the way of his duty. Every act of duty performed, fills his soul with a placid, still satisfaction, that is sensibly felt, though not easily expressed. A mouthful of meat bestowed on a hungry beggar, gives the heart of the donor more real satisfaction, than the relish of the food gives pleasure to the craving stomach, or the most delicious dainty gives to the vitiated palates of the voluptuous. And the particular excellency of these enjoyments is, that no excess can surfeit or pall the appetite, no accident can deprive him of them.

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TO a man possessed of such an incorruptible stock of happiness, the pleasures of this life appear but mere baubles; and the privation of them a trifling loss. Life itself he is disposed to resign with willingness, because to him death has no sting.

IF then felicity, even in this life, does not depend upon what are called the gifts of fortune, but on the disposition of soul that has been described, with what countenance can any Freethinker maintain, that in this world there is no interposition of the act of the Deity, no special providence? It may indeed be true, that wealth, and honours, and power do not attend the most deserving; and that halters, and infamy, and want do not lay hold on the vitious: but will it follow, from our not being able to see the hand of Providence in the distribution of those perishing favours on which the real happiness of man does not depend, that the Framers of the hearts of men has no communication with them, and never interposes to determine them

them to that wherein their chief felicity consists?

THE proofs of the goodness and justice of God, of the duty and dependence of man, of the certainty of rewards and punishments, of the desperate condition of those who, neglecting God and their duty, pursue fading pleasures and vanity with their whole spirit; and of the real and permanent happiness of such as enjoy all the gifts of God with thankfulness, and gratefully make it the business of their lives to obey his will, and to obtain his favour, are so conspicuous, that nothing seems to be wanted towards their producing *conviction*, but somewhat that shall turn their eye, and fix the attention upon them; because, if they are duly considered and attended to, the evidence is irresistible. Now, as that attention may be raised by various incidents, sometimes by sickness and distresses of different kinds, sometimes by a happy education, sometimes by the conversation of pious persons, and sometimes by reading and meditation, which a thousand circumstances seem-

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ingly accidental concur to improve; why should we conclude, that all these incidents are purely accidental; and that the person transformed, by them, from a miserable brute to a happy man, owes the change to blind chance? Whatever vain reasoners may imagine or bable, the person whose eyes are opened by those incidents, acknowledges with gratitude the hand of God in them,

BUT though Freethinkers might be excused for concluding, however rashly, that Providence does not interpose in the government of the external transactions of this world, because, after all the observations they can make, they have not compleat evidence to the contrary; yet what excuse can they have for pretending to judge, that the merciful and beneficent Spirit of God does not work upon the spirits of men? From their proper experience they can draw no observation, as they have locked out all regards for the Deity from their heart; and what passes in the spirits of other men they can have no knowledge of,
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nor indeed any idea, as they have suffered no such transactions to take place in their own.

PHILOSOPHERS have talked much of action and reaction in matter, and imagine they understand what they say; what should hinder them to believe, that there may be such a thing as action and reaction between spirits, even between the infinitely perfect Spirit and the spirits of finite men? If gratitude observed in a dog produces some regard and kindness in the mind of his master, why may not the gratitude, the warmth of the heart of man, work some similar effect in the all-seeing Mind? and who dare presume to say, that it may not act on, and comfort the spirit of man in return? If that beneficent and all-powerful Spirit does not shew his kindness in bestowing wealth, and power, and fading pleasures; it is because they are not real goods; because they are not the object of the heart and wishes of the party favoured; and because, in place of doing them real good, they might call off the affections from that exercise wherein his true felicity consists. And

this is so true, that crosses, disappointments, and distresses, may justly be considered as acts of the greatest kindness, when they tend to recal the straying mind from vanity, and to fix it on its proper object.

How then dares presumptuous short-sighted man deny the interposition of Providence, because he does not see the secret spring by which it acts, or know the intentions of the Inscrutable? Or how can he, because a satisfactory reason does not appear to him for the long-suffering patience and forbearance of the Most Merciful, doubt of the existence or justice of that Being; deny a future state; or maintain the indifference of all actions, as to right and wrong? But such is the fatal effect of the corruption of man's heart, and of the deflection of it from the true object to vice and vanity.

THE extreme folly of modern Freethinkers is much less accountable or excusable than that of the ancients. The ancients had no certain lights but those of nature. Those naturally

turally led them to see the vanity of the pursuits wherein they were engaged, the depravity of the human nature, and the consequences which might attend their courses hereafter. Those were but melancholy reflexions, leading to despair, and tending to sour every enjoyment; as they had no certain intimation, that any method was chalked out by the Deity for the expiation of sin, and for restoring offending man to his favour and protection. And therefore it is not to be wondered at, that they banished from their thoughts such gloomy uncomfortable speculations. But our modern madmen hear every day of mercy and pardon offered by the offended Deity to offending sinners, if they will receive it thankfully. They are told, that this is the declared will of God, and that there is compleat evidence of its being such; and they see, that this is the belief of numbers of the most sagacious and inquisitive of their fellow-creatures. But all this will not do. Their heart is given to other objects; and they hear, that these must be dismissed before they can share of the pardon proffered.

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To keep however their countenance, and the character of Freethinkers, they must assign some reason for their revolting against revelation. And this they readily do. They say, falsely, that they have carefully examined all the evidence for revelation; and they say, honestly and truly, that all the evidence which they have considered, has not been sufficient to satisfy their objections, and to convince them, that what is called revelation is really such.

THAT they have carefully examined *all* the evidence, is absolutely false. No man ever did, or can do so, without receiving perfect conviction. It is a question, whether any professed Freethinker who has hitherto appeared, had learning or talents sufficient to examine the evidence. It is certain, that none who have wrote, have discovered that they had either.

MEN may search for arguments *à priori* for the proof of any proposition that may result from the nature of things known to them.

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That treachery to our neighbour, and ingratitude to the God that made us, are highly offensive, and ought to be punished by perfect justice, may be demonstrated *à priori*. But if sovereign goodness and mercy, to deliver repenting men from deserved punishment, has contrived a method of salvation by sending his Son to the world to suffer for them; and if, to prevent their despair, and to encourage their repentance and amendment, that beneficent Being has been pleased to publish his pardon, with the conditions of it, to mankind; this must be admitted to be a matter of fact not discoverable by any inductions *à priori*; because it is in some sort adversary to our general notions of right and wrong; and therefore, to have any effect on the minds of men, must have been published with such a degree of evidence, as must necessarily gain full belief; and if it was the intention of the Author of this publication, that it should gain belief in future ages, the evidence must be of that nature that is fit to carry conviction to all for whom the publication was intended,

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ACCORDINGLY this revelation, which was made soon after the first transgression, was renewed from time to time, under circumstances so distinguished, as could not possibly leave any doubt, that it was the declaration of the Deity. And, by wisdom and power more than human, such a sort of evidence has been contrived and preserved for the authority of that revelation, as far exceeds, in point of certainty, the proof of any other event that ever happened. That such cities as *Babylon* and *Carthage* existed; that *Cæsar* won the battle of *Pharsalia*, and was murdered in the *Roman* senate, no one doubts. But if all the documents for the authority of revelation were brought together, the proof in this last case is by so much stronger than that in the others, as the belief of it is more interesting to mankind.

BUT the different degrees of credit given to the one and to the other, arise from the different dispositions of the hearts of men. There is no prejudice in the mind of man against admitting the first; against the last there

there is this violent bias, that if it is admitted, men must become in their own eyes miserable wretches, and must dismiss those lusts and vanities on which they doated. To prevent this disgrace and irreparable damage, arms must be taken up against the evidence that insults their quiet; any objection, (of which there are, and must be multitudes), if it cannot easily be answered, is a demonstration superior to all the evidence for revelation; and they look in to revelation, and to the evidence for it, only to arm themselves with such objections.

IT is indeed no wonder, that men whose prejudices stand so much in the way of believing, do not give themselves the trouble to search after, and to collect *all* the proofs for revelation. It is a laborious work. All the remains of ancient history, and the composures of the learned of those times, must be examined; all the rites, opinions, and practices of nations, so far as they can be discovered, must be considered; all the monuments of antiquity now extant, must be surveyed; a rea-

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sonable knowledge of the languages in which revelation is recorded, must be attained; and the consequences that have attended that revelation since the advent of Christ, must be adverted to, before one can say that he is possessed of all the evidence, and before he can form a judgment of many of the objections which Freethinkers move. But that none of them who have wrote, have given themselves this trouble, is plain from their writings; which contain little more than smatterings of learning, to which the *Jews* have helped them, and which they seem, without due examination, to have taken on trust.

THOUGH it has pleased the merciful wisdom of God, to scatter proofs of his revelation over all the ancient nations, and to preserve documents of them down to our days, for the conviction of obstinate infidels, and for the confirmation of the faith of the inquisitive who believe; yet, happily for the bulk of mankind, who have neither time nor talents for such inquiries, revelation is so calculated, as to require nothing of man that his
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conscious soul does not see to be his duty; and to promise him nothing that does not appear to his most inward sense to be the necessary consequence of doing it. By it he is acquainted with his forlorn condition; which he needs do no more to discover to be truth, than to turn his eyes inward upon himself. And a remedy is pointed out adequate to the disease; which tends to magnify the mercy, the wisdom, and the goodness of the Creator; and to tie the creature to him, by still stronger bonds of duty and gratitude.

IN this system there is such harmony between duty and interest, and therefore such a propensity in every sober-thinking person to wish it to be true, that, from the declared opinions of others, better qualified to judge of the evidence, and to determine, it gains belief; and that very belief, influencing the practice, brings real tranquillity and happiness in this life, springing from confidence of the favour of the Almighty; a sure earnest of future felicity. But by the debauched and the giddy, who have delivered themselves over

soul and body to their lusts, and to their vanity, this aptitude, this harmony is not discovered. Their fears make them wish it may not be true. Objections are rife in every corner; and if any inquiry is made into the proofs, it is with an intent to object, and to find them insufficient.

AND one of the main objections is, That there is place for any objection against the certainty of revelation. Why, say those reasoners, if it had been the intention of the Almighty, that what is called the revelation of his will should have been believed by all mankind to be such, he would have accompanied it with such evidence as should have been at first sight superior to all objections, and must have convinced and converted all infidels: but since he has not done so, but, on the contrary, room is left for many objections, the conclusion is just, that this pretended revelation is none of his. And it must be admitted, the inference would be pretty just, on supposal of the proposition, That it was the intention of the Deity to convince and
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convert all infidels, however wicked and reprobate. For it is not to be controverted, that it was in the power of the Almighty to have accompanied revelation with constant standing miracles, even as it was in his power to have created man with a smaller share of free-will, and, by perpetual interposition of his grace, to have prevented his actual defection from his duty. But upon what principle is it supposed, that God intended, or ought to have intended, to extend his grace alike to all; to the obstinate and flagitious, as well as to the sober and the humble sinner? The discretion of men makes a wide difference between those characters; and how can we be sure, that the judgment of God does not so also?

THE mercy of God has provided an atonement sufficient to expiate the sins of all mankind, who will take hold of it. The wisdom of God has contrived evidence sufficient to convince all mankind, that such atonement is provided, if they will give themselves the trouble to examine it. But then it is so contrived,

trived, as to reach with conviction those only who are disposed to take hold of it; that is, the meek and the humble, who are conscious of their distress by nature, and desirous to be delivered from it. And them it reaches, because they think it worth their while to inquire after, and to examine it; whilst it does not convince, nor indeed can it possibly, the proud and the stubborn, who slight the atonement provided so much, and are so thoroughly averse to comply with the condition upon which it is to be obtained, that without troubling their heads with the evidence, they insolently reject the mercy of the Most High. Who then can find fault with the divine goodness on this article? The meek surely will not; and the proud, who have themselves only to blame, ought not.

So the sum of the wise objection is this, That the good and just God did not intend, that salvation should reach those desperately wicked sinners who refused to accept of it. But this objection weighs with those who have never turned their thoughts upon the heinousness

ness of their own guilt; and have formed to themselves notions of the benignity of the Deity, from the false notions of generosity which they have encouraged in themselves, laying entirely aside his justice and his purity.

FROM the same source springs another objection, of equal validity as to revelation, founded on the doctrine of the perpetuity of punishment. Here again the incomprehensible, the infinitely perfect Being, is measured by the span of the low, blind, groveling creature that makes the objection; who, because he cannot comprehend why this justice is suited to the divine nature, concludes at once, that the doctrine is impossible, and therefore false; and, in consequence, rejects the revelation which is said to assert it, without giving himself the trouble to examine the evidence that supports that revelation, or to inquire whether the matter that thus shocks him, is really revealed. A careful inquiry might possibly satisfy him, that the perpetuity of punishments is not absolutely affirmed; and that no more is necessarily to be inferred
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from revelation, than that the misery of the damned is to endure for ages. But such an inquiry would give him competent satisfaction, that the revelation he wantonly rejects, is in very deed the word of God; and would dispose him to believe whatever it clearly declares concerning the Deity and his ways, without considering how far that might, or might not tally with his conceits.

AND herein lies the monstrous, the surprising folly of the vain philosopher. Every new observation, every discovery, which his sagacity has been accidentally led to make in nature, and which blows up his pride, becomes to him a fresh proof of his own weakness and short-sightedness, and of the immensity of the Deity, of the perfection of his wisdom, and of the inscrutability of his ways to man in his present condition: and yet, from his narrow notions, he will pretend to decide what God ought, or ought not; what he can, or cannot do.

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falls within his ken, the observations of the infinite wisdom, contrivance, and power of the Creator, daily grow upon him; new and unaccountable properties in matter, acting by unerring rules, and tending to the perfection of the whole, hourly pour in upon him; the magnet, the microscope, the telescope, the prism, the air-pump, the crucible, electricity, &c. furnish him with compleat evidence, that he knows nothing of the real nature of *matter*, which he sees, tastes, and feels, whereof he is in part composed, and in which he is at present immersed; and give him undoubted reasons to conclude, that there may be, or rather that there are numberless other properties in matter, and rules of acting which it steadily pursues, of which he at present has no knowledge, and possibly, so long as he is confined to clay, never can.

By what means then is he to judge of the spiritual world, of which he neither has, nor can have any adequate idea? A spirit acting in himself he feels, and is conscious of its

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actings; but what it is composed of, or how it acts, is all hidden from him. That there may be as many different classes of *spirits* as there are tribes of animals or plants, he dare not deny; though he can have no conception of the manner of their difference, or of the uses for which they may be in the creation. That the Creator is spiritual, he collects with certainty from the astonishing wisdom and artifice of so much of the universe as is disclosed to him; that he is good and bountiful in a sovereign degree, his works declare; and that he is possessed of all possible perfections, his self-existence demonstrates. But whence comes man to take upon him to determine, what perfection in any of his attributes is; that the justice of God must go thus far, and no farther; that his mercy requires he should, or should not do this or that; or that his goodness ought, or ought not to operate on such an occasion? This, sure, is the most astonishing presumption! Supposing him to have an adequate idea of justice, mercy, and goodness, as those must be by the Deity exercised in supreme harmony, as well as perfecti-

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on; how dare he presume to define, how far the exercise of either of them may go? Common sense, and that modesty which ought to attend consciousness of our dimness of sight, would direct us, when any thing in the ways or will of God appears that we cannot account for, to receive and acquiesce in it with humble submission, and to believe that it is right and just.

WHEREFORE, when we see the whole brute creation, animate as well as inanimate, pursuing constantly, and without erring, the intention of God in their formation; and when we observe, in that part of the rational creation which is known to us, the highest disorder and confusion, rebellion against God, injustice towards men, fraud and falsehood triumphant, virtue and sincerity despised and oppressed, and guilt contracted that must necessarily terminate in punishment, all the consequence of the freedom of will in man; let us not conclude, as madmen are apt to do, that all actions are indifferent to the Deity, or that no punishment is to attend

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guilt, upon a supposal, that it would have been unbecoming the benignity of God, who must have foreseen the consequence of free-will in man, to have brought into the world so many millions of rational creatures, who he foresaw must become the objects of wrath and punishment.

NOTHING is more certain, than that free-will has been the cause of transgression in man; and that the Deity must have fore-known the effects it was to produce. But are we sure, that, in the scale of essential justice, it was not right and just to have created man in a state of happiness, with a fitness and capacity to preserve that state, and to acquire one higher, and with a power to chuse between good and evil; with a sanction, that if he preferred evil to good, he must bear the dismal consequences of that perverse choice? Do we perfectly know the nature of the sovereignty and right which the Creator has to dispose of the creatures which he has made? Or are we acquainted with all the motives that induced the Most High to create man so qualified?

lified? Is it certain, that no good effect, worthy the divine goodness, to other parts of the unbounded creation, could have flowed from the fate of man? Or is it clear, that we are intitled to judge of the fitness or unfitness of any part of God's ways or works, without considering the relation it has to, and the effect it has on the whole? Until these questions meet with satisfactory answers, nothing can be more silly than to conclude as Freethinkers do.

A sober man, on the contrary, who sees and laments the disorders of mankind, will not give up the moral sense of his soul as to the merit or demerit of human actions; nor will he give up the justice or goodness of God, because he cannot precisely assign the motive that induced the Deity to endue man with that proportion of free-will with which he is possessed. Full conviction of the infinite disproportion that is between his limited understanding, and that of the self-existent Being, leads him to conclude with certainty, that his not being able to comprehend any thing,
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is not evidence that the Most High cannot. He may entertain himself profitably, at least pleasantly, in meditating on such subjects: but, though his invention should fail of solving the difficulty, he will not on that account deny principles, nor impeach the justice or goodness of his Maker.

THAT the end of God in creating man, endued with free-will, and with that proportion of reason, and of appetites, wherewith he was possessed, was not to discover to himself what use man was to make of those talents, must be evident to all who admit the omniscience and prescience of the Deity. But it is not so evident, that one of the motives of the Creator for framing man so qualified, may not have been, to render his justice and his mercy conspicuous to mankind; and to shew those attributes, as well as the effects of free-will left to chuse between the dictates of Reason and the bent of appetites, to other classes of rational beings, to us at present unknown.

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HAD all the rational creation unerringly pursued the dictates of Reason, that is, had they unerringly done their duty, there would have been no occasion for displaying the justice or the mercy of God. His immensity, his eternity, his astonishing power, goodness, and wisdom, were legible in his works; and it seems unreasonable to doubt, that one of the ends of the creation was, to exhibit to rational creatures compleat evidence of those glorious attributes and qualities. But unless some rational creature had offended, there could have been no example of justice, nor any object for mercy.

BEFORE any trespass committed, every rational being that supposed revolting against sovereign goodness possible, must have concluded, that the guilty deserved to be, and would be pursued by the vengeance of the Omnipotent. But in what manner justice required that this vengeance should be exerted, it could have no comprehension of; far less could it have any conception, that essential justice ungratefully affronted, should suffer
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thoughts of mercy to interpose in behalf of the insolent offender, and should devise a method, consistent with justice, to deliver the criminal from punishment, and restore him to his pristine favour.

BUT the abuse of free-will has given occasion to the manifestation of those divine qualities, which otherwise might have remained unknown to men and angels, in a light so distinguished, as must needs produce admiration, with praise and adoration, and give a more noble and interesting idea of the perfection of the Deity.

WE know but too well, that man has fallen; and the scripture acquaints us with the revolt of some of the angels. Their crime, we are told, met with instant condemnation and punishment, but man's with a very different usage. The convicted and ashamed offender had hopes of mercy immediately given him. Infinite wisdom found means to satisfy essential justice, and to make way for
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the display of mercy, that glorious and adorable attribute of the Most High.

THE cause of this diversity we can but guess at. The weakness of man, and the temptations he was liable to, we know; but the condition and temptation of the transgressing angels, we are not acquainted with. If we may however conjecture, their knowledge, capacity, and power was far beyond that of man; and consequently their defectiveness less excusable: and accordingly we find, their condemnation was by so much the more prompt and severe. Whereas, with respect to man, the execution of the sentence against him was suspended; mercy was offered; a method of reconciliation with the Deity was set on foot; repeated intimations were made by the clement Deity of this purpose of grace; repeated and renewed institutions were backed by divine authority, to recal men to their duty; the sovereign and essentially just Lord of the universe was pleased to proclaim himself merciful and gracious, long-suffering and patient; and, through a long succession

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of ages, that declaration has by experience been found to be strictly true. His long-suffering, accompanied with continual invitations to accept of pardon, endures to this moment, to the inexpressible joy of those that love and fear him; though it must at least turn to the utter confusion of those who heedlessly or wilfully reject the proffered grace.

IN the treatment of the fallen angels, for whom we know no shadow of excuse, nothing but strict justice appears. In the treatment of man, the severity of the justice of the Eternal is made conspicuous, chiefly by the atonement which his mercy has provided to expiate the guilt, and avoid the punishment of unhappy creatures. But that boundless pity and compassion, that essential mercy, and that unwearied patience, which has been, and still is exercised towards ungrateful man, could never have appeared to men and angels, if the abuse of free-will had not given occasion for the display of it.

IT is idle to inquire, because it seems impossible

possible to discover, what gave occasion to the revolt of the fallen angels. But it is probable, their sudden and severe punishment has prevented trespasses of the like nature. That exertion of the justice and power of the Eternal must have made a deep impression upon all spirits of the angelick order. And if the rectitude of the remaining choir is owing to the punishment of the rebellious crew, who will presume to find fault with God, for giving angels such a portion of free-will as to leave them fallible, or for resorting to rigid justice for the punishment of their offence?

HAD man, upon his first offence, been treated as he deserved; had threatened death immediately followed his crime, there would have been an end of the species: but there would have been no instance of the mercy, the tender-heartedness, the long-suffering of the Sovereign Being; none to sing his praises, or to bless him, on account of that divine attribute. As his perfect wisdom and exuberant grace has contrived it, millions

of the human race who have tasted of his goodness in this respect, feast their souls on the contemplation of his amazing condescendence, and with their whole spirit adore and bless him.

AND if it cannot be doubted, that the end of the formation of myriads of various plants, and other inanimate productions, is, to give to intelligent minds some sort of idea of the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of the Creator; why will conceited men quarrel with the divine œconomy regarding the human race? since without that part of it to which they object, there could have been no tolerable idea of the mercy or the long-suffering of the Deity, nor any heart to rejoice, or tongue to bless him, on that account.

BUT this reflexion goes still farther. We have heard of other rational creatures, besides ourselves, under the appellation of *angels*; some of whom fell, as we have done: and we know not whether any, or what diversity there may be of kinds amongst them.

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This much however may be concluded, that we cannot with any certainty determine, that there may not be between the supreme Being and us a vast variety of rational beings distinct from the human species, and differing from it as to the extent of understanding, affections, and inclinations: and considering the immensity of the universe, the high probability is, that such beings there are.

Now, if it may be further supposed, that those rational beings have any cognisance of what happens amongst the children of men, why may we not also suppose, that their information on this grand article was one of the ends in view with the Creator, when man was framed with that capacity to err that brought on the fall?

THAT angels, who are believed to have been formed very pure and perfect, were possessed of free-will, is plain; because they made a bad use of it, and fell. And if there are various classes of angels, and different species of spiritual or rational beings between

tween the highest order of angels and us, their actions must, at least, according to our conception of the actions of rational beings, may be determined by choice. And it is impossible for us to say, what diversity there may be in the understandings and capacities of those different ranks of creatures; what propensities or inducements to persevere in pursuing their duty, or what dispositions or temptations to err.

Now, who can tell how many myriads of those creatures may owe the state of felicity they now enjoy, to the correction of the lapsed angels, and to the scene of misery and folly which the conduct of the vain conceited part of mankind has, almost since the creation of this system, presented them with?

If a philosopher views with just contempt the scandalous springs from which the actions of the vicious proceed, what must be the sense of intelligent beings of a superior order? How foolish, as well as odious, must the notions of wicked men be in their eyes?

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And how noble and magnificent must their idea be of the mercy and long-suffering of the Eternal, who, for so great a series of ages, has been following such wretches with perpetual offers of forgiveness and felicity? If in such minds there are any appetites or impulsions similar to those that lead the vain and the wicked of the human race astray, how careful must they be to restrain such desires; and how thankful to their Maker, for the admonition that has put them on their guard? * * * * *

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